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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's efforts to develop new texts and revise the syllabus for English as a second language have included writing the texts with a communicative orientation but with a prominent structural component. Bahasa Indonesia is used to guarantee that the students understand the meaning of all the structures and forms as well as their functions in communication, since meaningfulness is an essential feature of the new syllabus. Because the students have already been taught the reading comprehension skill in their native language, there is no need to duplicate this effort except where there are differences in communicative strategies between the native language and English. The committee's conclusion is that the main objective of the reading lesson is to teach new language features in natural discourse. Therefore, the topic of the reading lesson should be made familiar to the students, and any other learning obtained from the lesson is to be considered a contingent gain. (MSE)

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The Communicative Approach: Questions Arising from Materials Writing in a TEFL Situation

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Introduction

The term "communicative" in such phrases as communicative competence (e.g., Hymes 1972), communicative syllabus (e.g., Munby 1978), and communicative approach (e.g., Widdowson 1978, Brumfit & Johnson 1979) has been with us for more than ten years. Other similar terms in language teaching referring to the communicational nature of language are: the communicational syllabus (e.g., Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum, Malaysia, 1975), the semantic syllabus (e.g., Johnson 1982), the notional syllabus (e.g., Wilkins 1976), the "functional syllabus" and "functional-notional approach" (e.g., Finocchiaro 1979), etc.

The interest in the communicative aspect of language seemed to be largely triggered by the extreme abstractness of Chomsky's view of language and his provocative dichotomy of competence versus performance (1975:4). This intellectual development has been sufficiently traced by Munby in his *Communicative Syllabus* (1978: 6–27). This development was mainly stimulated by the increasing interest and work in sociolinguistics which re-emphasized the social nature of language and the dependence of its form, meaning and purpose on the sociolinguistic context. This context includes setting, participants, purpose, etc. (cf. Hymes' acronym SPEAKING [Gumperz and Hymes 1972:65]). Another main reason was of course the frustrating results of the structural Audiolingual Method which produced fluent speakers of a second/foreign language who were not able to use the language in meaningful interaction.

No purpose would be served at present to further denounce the audiolingual method, its mechanical drills and its failure to utilize the learner's background knowledge and abilities (see my 1970 article). At present, the communicative approach has become sufficiently widespread that it has almost become a kind of fashion or band-

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wagon. However, there are still many problems and uncertainties related to "writing communicative materials" and developing communicative classroom procedures.

Writing Communicative Materials

The most detailed syllabus in the communicative approach that has come to my attention is the Council of Europe's *Threshold Level* (van Ek 1975). This syllabus is a full description of the language proficiency objectives of the Council of Europe's adult language learning programmes that will enable them to facilitate the movement of men and ideas in the West European area. I have elsewhere (1983) described our attempt at modifying this model for the purpose of our textbook writing project. The main problem remaining is how to implement this (modified) syllabus into teaching materials or textbooks.

After the adoption of a new curriculum in 1975, the Department of Education and Culture in Indonesia embarked on a program to revise or rewrite the existing textbooks in accordance with the new curriculum. For the purpose of a better coordination of the program, the Department set up the Integrated Textbook Project (ITP) in 1980. One of the set of textbooks to be rewritten was that of English for the SMP (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama* = Junior High School) and for the SMA (*Sekolah Menengah Atas* = Senior High School).

The writers of the ITP English textbooks desired to produce more meaningful and communicative materials than those in the previous textbooks. However, the 1975 syllabus on which they had to base their materials was completely structural; even the summary vocabulary section was much more morphologically than lexically oriented. In this effort of writing communicative materials to a structural syllabus, we were faced by two sets of questions or problems: one theoretical in nature and the other practical. The theoretical questions included:

(1) What should be the communicative objectives of the materials in an EFL situation like Indonesia, where reading competence is the main FL curricular objective?

(2) given a (suitably modified) syllabus, how does one select and grade materials in the communicative approach?

(3) how does one present communicative materials?

(4) how does one evaluate communicative competence?

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In the structural approach with its discrete structural items/forms, these questions can be answered straightforwardly. We have found these questions very difficult to answer. Possible answers to questions *b*, *c* and *d* above have been attempted by studying proposals made by such scholars as Widdowson (1978, 1979), Munby (1978), van Ek (1975), Finocchiaro (1983), Rivers (1983), Brumfit (1979) and Johnson (1982) on selection, grading and presentation of materials and Finocchiaro (1983) and Carroll (1980) on evaluation. We have had also several textbooks with a communicative orientation as comparative material; for example *Functions in English* (Jones 1977), *Notions in English* (Jones 1977), *In Touch* (Castro & Kinsbrough 1980), *Interaction* (O'Neill 1976), *Developing Communicative Competence* (Paulston *et al.* 1975).

However, all our considerations have been strongly influenced by the following practical constraints or considerations. Teaching-learning materials are written for certain students, within a certain school curriculum, to be used by certain teachers, and all of these within the content of available facilities and equipment. Our students have a heterogeneous linguistic background but have *Bahasa Indonesia* in common, which they learn as a school subject and acquire as a second language by virtue of its being the official language in the society and the medium of instruction in the educational system. For all our students, *Bahasa Indonesia* is the language of learning science and technology and of official business; in short, it is the language of intellectualism. This fact induced us to write materials that are based on the *Bahasa Indonesia* abilities of the student, in particular in using *Bahasa Indonesia* to explain meanings of words and sentences and to describe language situations (cf. Widdowson, 1978:18, suggesting the use of the students' native language as "translations at the level of use").

The school curriculum determines the place and time allotment for English, i.e., it is a compulsory subject and allowed only three or four periods of forty-five minutes per week. The main objectives as mentioned above is a reading ability of at least 1000 words at the end of the SMP and 4000 words at the end of SMA. This objective of reading ability is very vaguely defined (cf. my 1976 proposed definition) and more will be said on this below.

The third practical constraint is the teachers who have certain abilities, knowledge, and educational background, which have

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[illegible] their theoretical orientation, preparation and their professional experience. The English language teachers in Indonesia have all been educated in the structural-behaviouristic audio-lingual method of TEFL. They have been "indoctrinated" in the drill method of teaching English that they might feel disoriented if they had to use a communicative textbook like *In Touch*. In the first place they may not know much of the language used there and may not be able to handle the types of exercises in the book. This consideration made us design the book in such a way that the teachers will find some familiar materials and exercises but with the fundamental difference that everything is made meaningful through glossing of terms and explanations of structures and situations in *Bahasa Indonesia*.

The books will be issued with a separate teacher's guide that explains the thinking and philosophy behind the materials. One section of the teacher's guide gives an overview of TEFL methodology with a number of alternative exercises for each materials component which the teacher can draw on to provide more variety to the exercises already given in the textbooks. Another section contains the answers to the exercises. This we have done considering the level of proficiency of the teachers that may have been adequate on graduation from Teachers College, but that, as can be expected in their non-English-using sociolinguistic situation, will have declined considerably with the passing of time.

An additional complication of the job of writing English language materials was created by the recent decision of the Department of Education to revise the curriculum beginning with the 1984–85 school year (Ministerial Decree No. 0461/U/1983, dated 22–10–1983). The revision decree itself had been anticipated, because the evaluation of the implementation of the 1975 curriculum had strongly indicated the need for a revision. So the ITP English language textbooks already incorporate the aspects that were intended for a revised syllabus like the switching of the focus from structures to language use, and the use of reading passages as communicative discourse rather than as reinforcement of previously learnt structures and vocabulary. Dialogues are used to exemplify language functions rather than the introduction or reinforcement of structures.

However, the timing of the decision came rather as a surprise and the short time available for the formulation of a new syllabus for

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the 1975 curriculum (i.e., SMA Form I) may have led to some formulations that will need to be revised later. Fortunately, the Department's implementational directives stipulated that the new syllabus would still contain the essential materials of the 1975 curriculum although they may have to be reorganized, and that there would be no immediate need for a revamping of textbooks. Consequently, the lines of action taken by ITP in writing a new set of English textbooks can still be considered acceptable as they are in accordance with the principles stipulated in Article 4 of the decree, in particular items *e* (flexibility), *f* (efficiency of the learning process) and *h* (utilization of the results of research and development).

Communicative Materials for Reading Objectives

The communicative syllabus developed by the Council of Europe has as objective "a level of oral communicative ability", as the target group is assumed not to need "a general ability to read and to write the foreign language" (van Ek 1975:17). This oral communication objective is also true for all the course books mentioned above. Even though most of them contain some reading components, the focus is on oral ability and therefore dialogues form by far the largest part of the books. The same is true also for more recent communicative course books like *English Alfa* (Houghton Mifflin 1981), *World English* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich International 1982) and *Spectrum* (Regents Publishing Co. Inc. 1982).

In Indonesia, the main objective of TEFL is *reading ability* for the purposes of further study and of science and technology (cf. Nababan 1983). The level of emphasis on reading ability has never been operationally defined (see, however, Nababan 1976). The 1967 Ministerial Decree No. 096/1967 concerning the functions and objectives of English language teaching in secondary schools only states that the objectives of English language teaching are:

1. effective reading ability;
2. ability to understand spoken English;
3. writing ability;
4. speaking ability.

The primary emphasis on reading ability is expressed only by the order of the listing, the considerations stated and the reference made to the results of the meeting between the Department's Centre for Research and Development in Education and the Coordinating

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Board of English Language Teaching in November 1987.

The most recent attempt at operationalizing the level of emphasis is the suggestion for a needs analysis made by the 1985 seminar on ELT Methodology for SMP-SMA. The seminar also proposed a possible objectives profile for SMP and SMA that might result from such a needs analysis. The objectives profile conjectured for the usual 4 (four) language skills is as follows (Laporan/72):

	SMP	SMA
Reading	30%	30%
Listening	20%	10%
Speaking	20%	20%
Writing	10%	20%
	100%	100%

This objective profile is skill-based and appears to be (in Widdowson's terminology) usage oriented. A more adequate profile should have another dimension, namely that of use, in order to include the communicative aspects of these skills. How this might be formulated is not too clear at present, but it seems that it would contain some kind of specification of the communicative or language functions for which these skills are to be used. These language functions should be specified on the basis of an analysis of the societal needs for English as a foreign language in the country. Nevertheless, an objectives profile like the one presented above is helpful in the writing of materials, because it can guide the textbook writer to determine how much space and material he should allot to the attainment of each of the skills.

Another way of defining the degree of emphasis on the various skills objectives is by allotting the desired proportion of teaching-learning time to the appropriate skills. The objectives profile above could perhaps be interpreted in this way. Thus it would mean that 50 per cent of classroom time (and perhaps also of home-work time) should be devoted to the attainment of reading skill, i.e., reading, discussion and doing pertinent exercises.

In the syllabus for the "core curriculum" of Form I SMA, this emphasis on reading is expressed in the form of class time allotment. In this core curriculum that will take effect in July 1984, English is allowed 3 periods (of 45 minutes) a week in each semester. This

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[illegible] 16 x 3 = 48 periods of effective classroom teaching-learning [illegible]. Of these 48 periods, 16 periods will be given to structure, 28 periods to reading and vocabulary building, and 4 periods to dialogue (or the productive expression of notice/meaning and the carrying out of functions). This formulation may look unsystematic, because "structure" is an element of the language system and so is vocabulary, whereas Reading and Dialogue are language acts. However, the accompanying explanations have made it clear that they are used for teaching-learning procedures and content, and that the language elements of structures and vocabulary should be oriented towards the improvement of reading skill or the language act of comprehension reading.

The Communicative Approach in the Teaching of Reading

This now brings us back to the main problem addressed by this paper. If reading ability is the main objective of ELT in Indonesia and one wants to apply the communicative approach in it, then one is faced with the question of "how to teach foreign language reading in the communicative approach". None of the course books mentioned above offers much help, because they are all oriented toward oral communicative ability. There are many articles on the teaching of reading comprehension, but there are not too many articles that I have seen that are quite relevant to the teaching of reading as a foreign language.

This question arose (among many other questions) during the design stage of the ITP English language textbooks. At this stage we asked ourselves several basic questions. Given that reading ability was the dominant objective of TEFL in Indonesia, we asked amongst others the following methodological questions:

(1) How shall we organize the textbook materials;
  (i) how many units per book?
  (ii) what sections or components in each unit?
  (iii) how much space/time for each component?
(2) What are the specific instructional objectives of each component?
(3) Will the aggregate of the component instructional objectives meet the Indonesian TEFL objective?
(4) What form should the component materials take in order to meet their specific instructional objective?

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We did give pragmatic answers to these questions to make it possible for us to proceed to the writing of the textbook. However, these questions have kept worrying my mind, and this has led me to write this paper, i.e., put my thoughts on paper. In a way, one can consider this paper as passing on the questions to the participants of the seminar.

The above question ("How to teach foreign language reading in the communicative approach") can be divided into 4 (four) sub-questions:

(1) Is reading a communicative act?
(2) What should one be teaching in the teaching of FL reading?
(3) How should one select and write the reading passages?
(4) What procedures can one follow in teaching FL reading?

We will discuss these questions one by one below.

Is reading a communicative act? It seems clear that we all agree that it is. In all reading, some information is transferred from a transmitter (i.e., the writer) to a receiver (i.e., the reader [see also Smith 1971:12]). Therefore, it will also seem clear that the communicative approach can be used in the teaching of reading. The communicative teaching of reading can perhaps be characterized by specifying the language skills involved in reading and outlining the procedures to be followed in helping students learn these language skills.

I have attempted to do this by going through the list of language skills in Munby's *Communicative Syllabus Design*, and identified fourteen main skills and four additional skills (see Appendix). I will not say much about procedures except that the teachers, in their capacity as "facilitators", need only make the students aware of the existence of those language skills and exemplify their use, and for the rest be ready to assist students who ask for help.

The second question concerns what one should be teaching in the teaching of FL reading:

(1) The *skill* of reading (i.e., comprehension reading or "fluent reading" in Smith's terminology in opposition to "beginning reading" [1971:3])?
(2) The *language features* in the reading passage?
(3) The *information* contained in the reading passage?

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If we intend to teach the skill of comprehension reading in the FL, it would seem unreasonable to expect that the students would be able to achieve a higher level of ability in reading the FL than their reading skill in the NL, which they use as a medium of instruction in all subjects and in which they do all their reading. Therefore, common sense would dictate that we should not make comprehension reading skill as the objective of the reading component in the teaching of EFL. If the students acquire a higher skill in comprehension reading by practising reading in their NL *and* in a FL, it would just be a bonus on whatever the students will be gaining from a FL reading lesson.

Is it then information or knowledge that the students are acquiring from a reading lesson in a FL? It is very alluring to give a positive answer to this question. However, that cannot be a legitimate objective of a FL reading lesson, because whatever educational information is needed by secondary school students, it is better and more easily acquired through the NL. If in a FL reading passage some new information is presented or some familiar information is presented again for the purpose of refresher or reinforcement, it should then be regarded as a bonus on top of the main purpose of the reading passage.

The third possibility is "teaching the language features in the reading passage". These language features will include structures, vocabulary and communicative strategies of writing. These language features will then be introduced in natural contexts and presented as

the communicative devices that they are. The use of already familiar language elements and communicative units in reading passages is to be considered as the natural reinforcement of previously learnt knowledge.

Of the three possible instructional objectives of the reading, this third one, the teaching of language features, seemed to us the most reasonable objective. Therefore, we made the reading lessons in learning experience to expand the learner's knowledge of vocabulary and structures. When we started writing the materials, we were not quite clear about the best way of handling the communicative strategies like generalization, definition, description, comparison, analogy, classification and hypothesization. In the first place, we believed that these strategies were universal, although there might be language-specific techniques of certain communicative functions. However, none of us were aware of any contrastive analyses of such communicative strategies in English and *Bahasa Indonesia*, on which we could draw to determine which particular communicative strategies would need special treatment.

Secondly, if we had included the discriminate understanding of communicative strategies as an instructional objectives, it would have further complicated our efforts to maintain the natural communicative character of the reading passages. Some of the topics were determined by the Department. These topics deal with matters of national or social importance which have an educational value like ecology and family planning. These topics are familiar to the students and so are the other topics of the reading passages. The use of these familiar topics are intended *to provide a cognitive set for the learning of new English language features*. In addition, the discussion of these topics in the reading passage is expected to reinforce the students' positive attitude toward the topics.

If a topic is rather unfamiliar to the students, it is introduced by proactive facilitating organizers (cf. Ausubel 1963:29). Although the students learn English for ability to read for information, this ability is to be used only *after* they have acquired sufficient language knowledge. Therefore, we do not use the reading lesson of EFL to convey objective new information but *to learn the English language*. Questions relating to content and inference are used only to check the students' level of *understanding the new language features* presented in the reading passage. To Widdowson's question on the topic

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of comprehending and reading how we can "contrive to make the language we present them of a contrivance" (1978:79), we would answer with the first of his three alternatives; namely, use reading passages which are also "pieces of genuine discourse" and we would add that the topics are familiar to the learners".

Conclusion

We have taken a glance of the developments of TEFL in Indonesia and the Department of Education programmes in writing new EFL course books and revising the syllabus. We have discussed some of the problems encountered in writing communicative materials to a structural syllabus for use by teachers trained in the audiolingual tradition.

The solution attempted in Indonesia is the writing of textbooks with a communicative orientation but with a still prominent structure component in which Bahasa Indonesia is used to guarantee that the students understand the meaning of all the structures and forms and their functions in communication. Meaningfulness is made a *sine qua non* in the TEFL materials and an essential feature of the new syllabus.

The question of the reasonable objectives of the teaching of reading has been discussed at some length. One fact cited but generally overlooked is that EFL learners have already been taught comprehension reading skill in their NL. There is no need to duplicate this effort except when there are differences in communicative strategies between English and the NL. Our conclusion has therefore been that the main objective of the reading lesson should be the teaching of new language features in natural discourse. Therefore, the topics of the reading passages should be, or be made, familiar to the students. Any other learning obtained from the reading lesson is to be considered contingent gains.

Some of the things I have mentioned above may sound unusual and controversial. This perhaps came from my mental propensity for exploring avenues of thought "where angels fear to tread". Therefore, I would feel gratified if I have succeeded in provoking one or two of you to worry about something I have put forward above.

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APPENDIX

List of Language Skills in Reading

(summarized from J. Munby, *Communicative Syllabus Design*. The numbers in parentheses are the numbers in CSD)

1. Deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items, through understanding word formation. (49)
2. Understanding explicitly stated information. (50)
3. Understanding information in the text, not explicitly stated, through (51)
4. Expressing information implicitly, through. (52)
5. Understanding conceptual meaning, especially. (53)
6. Understanding the communicative value (function) of sentences and utterances. (54)
7. Understanding relations within the sentence, especially elements of sentence structure. (55)
8. Understanding relations between parts of a text through lexical cohesion devices of repetition. (56)
9. Understanding relations between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices of reference (anaphoric and cataphoric). (57)
10. Interpreting text by going outside it, using exophoric reference (58)
11. Recognising indicators in discourse for introducing an idea. (59)
12. Distinguishing the main idea from supporting details, by differentiating. (60)
13. Extracting salient points to summarise. (61)
14. Selective extraction of relevant points from a text, involving. (62)
15. Basic reference skills: understanding and use of graphic presentation, viz. headings, sub-headings, numbering, indentation, bold print, footnotes. (63)
16. Recognising the script of a language. (64)
17. Skimming to obtain. (65)
18. Scanning to locate specifically required information etc. (66)

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